CSIP Project: Bridging the Information Gap for Latino Mental Health

Through the Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE), I had the opportunity over the last 10 months to develop a project aimed at addressing mental health disparities in San Mateo County. With the support and guidance of the Latino Collaborative (LC), my project aimed to increase access of mental health information to the Latino Community through a subscription-based monthly newsletter. While my initial project differed from the final product, the process of developing the project helped me gain experiences navigating the logistics of program implementation in a County system.

Project Goals

During the development phase of the project, I had a few goals already in mind. I knew I wanted to provide something for the Latino community that was useful and in some way helping people access mental health information. To get a better idea about the mental health needs of Latinos in San Mateo County, I consulted with the LC co-chairs, Arlette Molina and Priscilla Padilla-Romero. Arlette and Priscilla provide useful information regarding past projects and objectives of the LC. I shared with them my initial ideas, as well as my own knowledge regarding Latino mental health. The end result was a project able to meet our mutual goals. The LC needed some basic information updated on the website, and help advertising the website as a resource. My goal was to develop an online forum for parents connected to the LC website. In marketing for this project, I would include the LC website information on any advertising materials.

Unfortunately, the project had to be modified due to logistical and administrative issues in creating a webpage and gaining editing privileges. As with all government or large organizations, website content needs to meet certain standards established by those

organizations. Information that is inaccurate or potentially offensive could harm the reputation of the organization and sever times with the community. For this reason, organizations need to preapprove content or only limit content editing privileges to those with knowledge of standards for content. Moreover, there were potential issues of liability. Particular for a forum-format in which people are posting on the website, it would be necessary to monitor user comments for appropriateness. Needless to say, I had to modify the original idea. The new idea was to create a subscription-based newsletter to provide all Latino community members with information about various related topics in mental health. Each month, the newsletter would highlight articles, videos, or particular topics relevant to the Latino population. Newsletters would be available in both English and Spanish. My goal was to make mental health more approachable by bringing Latinos issues that are relevant to their lives in their preferred language.

Mental Health and Information-Seeking in the Latino Community

Before creating the newsletters, I needed to find out more about mental health disparities and the use of the Internet as a means to reduce disparities. In my research, I found that Latinos were not accessing mental health services due to barriers of cost, language, and stigma. Although the prevalence of mental health issues were not drastically different compared to other ethnic groups, there were particular subgroups that fare the worse, including U.S. born Latinos, low SES, and individuals with limited English proficiency.

Research on mental health information-seeking among the Latino indicates that the internet is increasing used as a source of information, with 18-64 year old Latinos using the internet at higher rates than other age groups to find health-related information. Moreover, Latinos have lead the way in internet use over the past year spending 8 or more hours watching

internet videos each month (1.5 hours more than the U.S. average), and with over 72% of

Latinos owning smartphones (10% more than U.S. average). Indeed the internet seemed to be a

viable way to disseminate information, but as I found out in my literature search, there are also

many ways in which the internet has been unable to meet the needs of Latinos. Although Latinos

are gaining more access to the internet and using it at high rates, much of the content is not

accessible to Latinos. Some of the barriers to access include: lack of Spanish language content,

information written in technical language, and inaccurate or misleading information. For this

reason, I believed it was vital to provide newsletter subscribers with content in both English and

Spanish, while also spending time to carefully curate the content within the newsletters.

Project Development

Armed with information to guide the newsletter development, I began to work on the

newsletter. I decided to create 12 newsletters in order to cover content for an entire year. I used

the free email marketing software, MailChimp, to create and design newsletters. MailChimp

allowed users to create a list of contacts, schedule newsletter mailings, and facilitate newsletter

subscription. The scheduling feature was particularly useful, given that the newsletters would

need to be sent out after my rotation ends.

Content

During the content development phase, I found it difficult to find useable information.

Many of the articles were too technical or did not have Spanish translations. Since I was not

creating any of the content, I needed to find high quality information available in both languages.

Similar to what I found in the research, I noticed a lack of content specifically created for Latino

populations. That is, content that was available Spanish, discussing relevant topics (i.e., anxiety

related to immigration fears, acculturation conflicts, discrimination, and others), and lower

reading levels. In the absence of articles, I would look for videos to illustrate a particular

point. I was then left with the task of writing short descriptions to the videos that help tie in

mental health concepts. I tried to include tips and techniques individuals can use to improve

mood (i.e., guided imagery, video guided meditation, and more) in every newsletter as a way of

providing readers real tools to use immediately. Although each newsletter had unique content, I

developed a template to help organize the information in a standard way. The format consisted of

the following:

1. Welcome message: Description of the purpose of the newsletters

2. Newsletter theme: Block indicating the theme of the newsletter (i.e., Anxiety Edition
    or Family Edition)

3. 3-4 Content blocks: Articles and videos related to theme of newsletter

4. "Orgullo Latino" (Latino Pride) Block: Selection of a celebration within a particular
    Latino country

5. Upcoming community events: Link to San Mateo County blog and social media
    accounts

6. Survey link: Connects users with SurveyMonkey survey to provide feedback on LC
    website content and newsletter content

7. Important Contact and Information: Links to SMC resources

8. Disclaimer: Short statement indicating that the presented information was not to
    replace the advice of a psychologist and was only to be used for informational
    purposes only

Once I had assembled the content, I also needed to choose pictures to include with the content. Though many of the photos were standard stock photos, it was also important that I include pictures of Latinos. Not only would photos of other Latinos help individuals connect to the contact, but I also wanted to show the diversity of Latinos.

Marketing

With the assistance of ODE funds, I was able to create and print 1000 flyers advertising the LC website as a resource for the Latino community and encouraging individuals to signup. Flyers were printed double-sided with one side in English and the other in Spanish. I distributed flyers among LC members as well as emailed LC community partners an electronic version. Remaining flyers remain with LC co-chairs for later distribution at upcoming community events. A copy of the flyer mock-ups was given to LC co-chairs for the purposes of future reprinting.

Feedback

Under ideal conditions, I would include more community feedback during the content development phase. However, I was limited in my availability to conduct focus groups or community surveys. To help improve future content and guide dissemination of information, I created a 5-item survey using SurveyMonkey. Although I had made no plans to analyze the feedback myself, the information was available for the LC co-chairs to use it as they see fit in the future.

My Experience and Recommendation for BHRS

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity given to me by ODE. It allowed me to gain experience with program implementation, while also providing the Latino community with much needed information. I learned three important lessons throughout this process, (1) progress takes time, (2) sometimes simplicity is necessary to make a dent in mental health disparities, and (3)

there is a great deal of need for mental health providers to create content targeting Latino

consumers. I believe my work with ODE, YSC and LC has reminded me of the importance of

integrating clinical work with research and community work. As far as recommendations for the

future, I would only recommend that ODE document previous interns' projects along with

challenges encountered. I think in seeing some of the struggles of previous interns, current

interns can better plan their projects. Had I been more aware of the logistical issues that come

with setting up a webpage, I would have modified my project much sooner.